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IN THE CLAIMS:

Claim 1 (Previously Presented): A method executed within a processing unit for filtering packets, comprising the steps of:

- receiving a packet that includes an encrypted identifier and an unencrypted remainder of said packet, for verifying identity of a first device that sent said packet;
- authenticating said identifier;
- determining whether to forward said packet to a second device based on result of said authenticating, and a policy relative to said source device; and
- forwarding said packet to said second device in accordance with said determination.

Claim 2 (Previously Presented): The method of claim 1, wherein said step of determining comprises:

- comparing authenticated identifier yielded by said step of authenticating to a list of identifiers;
- retrieving at least one policy rule relative to said authenticated identifier;
- determining whether to send said packet to said second device in accordance with said policy rule.

Claim 3 (Canceled).

Claim 4 (Original): The method of claim 1, wherein said authenticating is performed in accordance with IPSEC standards.

Claim 5 (Original): The method of claim 1, wherein said authenticating comprises:

- retrieving a pointer to a security association from an authentication header from said packet;
- retrieving a key associated with said security association; and
- determining whether said packet is authentic using said key.

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Claim 6 (Previously Presented): The method of claim 5, further comprising the step of sending a first message to a third device indicating said identifier is not authentic when said step of authenticating so determines.

Claim 7 (Original): The method of claim 5 wherein said authentication header is an IPSEC authentication header.

Claim 8 (Previously Presented): The method of claim 1, wherein said packet is, in addition, encrypted, and said method further comprises decrypting said packet prior to authenticating.

Claim 9 (Original): The method of claim 8, wherein said packet is encrypted and decrypted using one of group of cryptographic techniques comprising DES, triple DES, HMAC and RSA.

Claim 10 (Previously Presented): The method of claim 1, wherein said policy rule is stored in a policy configuration file at said processing unit.

Claim 11 (Previously Presented): A machine-readable memory whose contents cause a computer system to perform packet filtering, by performing the steps of:

- receiving a packet that includes an encrypted identifier for verifying identity of a first device that sent said packet, while remainder of said packet unencrypted;
- authenticating said identifier;
- determining whether to forward said packet to a second device based on result of said authenticating, and a policy relative to said source device; and
- forwarding said packet to said second device in accordance with said determination.

Claim 12 (Previously Presented): The machine-readable memory of claim 11, wherein said determining comprises:

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comparing authenticated identifier yielded by said step of authenticating to a list of identifiers;

retrieving at least one policy rule relative to said authenticated identifier;

determining whether to send said packet to said second device in accordance with said comparison and said policy rule.

Claim 13 (Canceled).

Claim 14 (Original): The machine-readable memory of claim 11, wherein said authenticating is performed in accordance with IPSEC standards.

Claim 15 (Original): The machine-readable memory of claim 11, wherein said authenticating comprises:

retrieving a pointer to a security association from an authentication header from said packet;

retrieving a key associated with said security association; and determining whether said packet is authentic using said key.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): The machine-readable memory of claim 15, further comprising the step of sending a first message to a third device indicating said identifier is not authentic when said step of authenticating so determines.

Claim 17 (Original): The machine-readable memory of claim 15 wherein said authentication header is an IPSEC authentication header.

Claim 18 (Previously Presented): The machine-readable memory of claim 11, wherein said packet is, in addition, encrypted, and said method further comprises decrypting said packet prior to authenticating.

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Claim 19 (Original): The machine-readable memory of claim 18, wherein said packet is encrypted and decrypted using one of group of cryptographic techniques comprising DES, triple DES, HMAC and RSA.

Claim 20 (Previously Presented): The machine-readable memory of claim 11, wherein said policy rule is stored in a policy configuration file at said processing unit.

Claim 21 (Previously Presented): A packet filter for a distributed firewall, comprising:

- an input means coupled to said first network for receiving a data packet from a first device, said data packet having an encrypted common host identifier for verifying identity of a first device that sent said packet via a decryption process, while remainder of said packet unencrypted;
- a first buffer coupled to said input means for storing said received packet;
- a first memory segment containing a list of common host identifiers and at least one policy rule;
- a second memory segment for storing a program for decrypting said common host identifier, authenticating said common host identifier, and determining whether to send said packet to a second device based on said list and said policy rule;
- a processor coupled to said first buffer, said first memory segment and said second memory segment for executing said program; and
- an output means coupled to said first buffer for forwarding said compared data packet to said second device based on said comparison.

Claim 22 (Previously Presented): The apparatus of claim 21, further comprising a second buffer for storing said compared data packet prior to forwarding said compared data packet to the second device.

Claim 23 (Canceled).

Claim 24 (Canceled).

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Claim 25 (Canceled).

Claim 26 (Canceled).

Claim 27 (Canceled).

Claim 28 (Canceled).

Claim 29 (Canceled).

Claim 30 (Canceled).

Claim 31 (Canceled).

Claim 32 (New) The method of claim 1 where said identifier relates to hardware.

Claim 33 (New) The method of claim 1 where said identifier relates to an IP source address.

Claim 34 (New) The method of claim 1 where said receiving a packet is unsolicited.